DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 294 SP 025 572

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TITLE	The Schools and Preservice Education: Expectations and Reasonable Solutions.
SPONS AGENCY	National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Oct 84
NOTE	12p.; Seminar paper presented at a Hearing of the National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education (Austin, TX, October 4-5, 1984). For related documents, see SP 025 564-595.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Beginning Teachers; Career Choice; Expectation; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; Professional Recognition; *Teacher Alienation; Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Salaries; *Teaching (Occupation)
IDENTIFIERS	National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Educ

ABSTRACT

Many problems arise from inaccurate expectations for preservice teacher education and its relationship to what goes on in elementary and secondary schools. Preservice education is expected to provide schools with a continuous supply of highly qualified candidates. However, preservice teacher education exerts little proactive control over teacher supply, which is governed by large marketplace factors such as perceptions of the occupation, expectations of job opportunities, and relative salary advantages. Preservice education is also expected to provide fully prepared and competent teachers, able to handle the daily work of schools without further support or assistance. New teachers are expected to be a source of research-based innovations in teaching. Pressures on schools of education are such that much time is spent defining and rearranging credit hours rather than focusing on such basic questions as what a teacher must reasonably know to function effectively in the classroom. The expectations of new teachers are often unrealistically high, and when they are faced with the realities of the classroom, students, school administration, and extrinsic rewards, disillusionment is frequent. Specific recommendations are offered for building toward much needed reform in preservice teacher education programs to prepare prospective teachers for the realities of their profession. (JD)

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The Schools and Preservice Education: Expectations and Reasonable Solutions

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Our country's educational system is embroiled in controversy. Rightly or wrongly, the general public sees a precipitous decline in the quality of teachers in our schools. The search for the ultimate cause of this problem weaves a complex path that inevitably leads to teacher education and, in particular, preservice teacher education. If only better teachers were given better preparation, we wouldn't have undisciplined schools and poor test scores.

Menken once observed that for every complex problem there is a simple solution and it is usually wrong. For preservice teacher education, simple solutions abound, and most, if not all, are in the final analysis wrong. In this paper we will argue that simple solutions in preservice teacher education are wrong primarily because they are built on misunderstandings of the enterprise, misunderstandings that are tied to a set of incomplete and sometimes inaccurate expectations for preservice teacher education and its relationship to what goes on in elementary and secondary schools.

Three aspects of expectations for preservice teacher education are examined here: (1) expectations for what preservice teacher education is supposed to do for the schools; (2) expectations for teacher educators that are embedded in contexts in which teachers are educated, i.e., schools and institutions of higher education; and, (3) expectations that preservice

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students hold for the occupation of teaching. The concluding section contains some specific recommendations upon which to build toward much needed reform in preservice teacher education programs.

What Preservice Teacher Education Is Supposed To Do For Schools

Teacher education is not unlike most organizational systems designed to produce, create, or further the development of a product. The entire enterprise is shaped to a large degree by the forces of the marketplace. That is to say, teacher education is not immune from the expectations and needs of those who will ultimately take on its graduates...the schools.

What do schools expect of preservice programs? At one level, preservice teacher education is expected to provide schools with a continuous supply, or better still a slight oversupply, of only highly qualified candidates. This seems to be a fairly reasonable expectation until one considers the fact that the demand for new teachers varies enormously from time to time and from place to place. Population trends over the past three decades, for example, have caused dramatic shifts in the demand for new teachers. Presumably teacher education as an enterprise is responsible for anticipating these demand cycles and deliberately adjusting the supply accordingly. Of course, the reality has been the reverse. Supply inevitably seems to reach its peak when demand hits a low point, and supply is at its lowest when demand becomes critical. Moreover, there is a natural delay in the response cycle which increases the probability that the number of graduates of teacher education programs will not keep pace with the need for new teachers.

The fact is that preservice teacher education exerts little proactive control over the supply of teachers. The available supply is governed, rather, by large marketplace factors such as perceptions of the occupation,

expectations of job opportunities, and relative salary advantages. Supply levels cannot be increased simply by improving the quality of teacher education programs or making them appear to be more exciting. Career choices are not based solely on the attractiveness of preparation programs. Indeed, would anyone expect to find a prospective law student who asserts: "I want to be a lawyer because I think I'm going to like law school."

At another level, preservice teacher education is expected to graduate finished products: fully prepared and competent teachers, indistinguishable from their experienced colleagues, able to handle the daily particulars of schools and classrooms, and needing no further support, assistance, or school-system energies. Few school systems acknowledge the complexity of teaching and the demands of their own complicated curricula by providing preservice graduates with 30-40 hours of focused inservice designed specifically to support their first year of teaching. Schools expect immediate and total implementation.

From our perspective it is simply unreasonable to expect that teachers will learn everything they need to know in a brief preservice experience, especially since much of the knowledge teachers acquire is derived from many experiences with particular cases and situations. When teachers ultimately reach this finished-product attitude, it is not surprising that in hindsight they became disenchanted with their preservice preparation.

Finally, preservice teacher education is often seen as the primary, if not the sole, link between research (new knowledge developed in higher education settings and research centers) and practice (application in real classrooms). As a result, teacher education is frequently expected to be a source of innovation in education, to prepare candidates to change the status quo in schools and overcome archaic ways of teaching. From this

perspective, preservice preparation should be discontinuous from schooling. Candidates should not be exposed to standard practices and role models or trained to work in conventional settings. Rather, they should be encouraged to develop a critical perspective regarding school practice, adopt innovative philosophies of education, and learn progressive techniques and programs. In the extreme, a missionary view of teacher preparation would suggest that students have little contact with the realities of schools and classrooms.

In considering these multiple expectations and the ebb and flow of intensity of the various expectations as they interact with one another and the societal context at large, it is no wonder that preservice teacher education is in disarray. In attempting to do all things, none is done well. The track record for preservice teacher education is one of alternately preparing too few or too many ill-equipped teachers who operate initially (and quite justifiably) from a perspective of survival rather than a vision of what teaching and schools can be. Indeed, it is reasonable to ask whether we can expect teacher education to bear the good news into a change resistant environment or to assume responsibility for effects that require the combined resources of an entire school system.

Institutional Contexts And The Preservice Teacher Educator

Preservice teacher education takes place in multiple contexts--schools of education, academic departments, schools, and classrooms. Typically, preservice teacher education is a secondary (and in some cases, tertiary) function in each of these contexts. Schools and classrooms exist to teach elementary and secondary pupils, and teacher education activities are often pushed to the background because of the demands of the primary task. Academic departments exist to provide general education and advanced

knowledge in specific disciplines, and teacher education must find its place within these dominant activities. Schools of education, embedded in academic reward and prestige systems, are often pulled away from preservice preparation, an effect that is largest in the major public and private universities in which teacher education ironically enjoys the lowest status in the array of graduate programs and research.

Who are the teacher educators that function in these institutional contexts? This is not an easy question to answer. There are in fact few individuals who would describe themselves or be described by others as teacher educators. Analogous to the institutional settings in which teacher education takes place, teacher educators assume that role as a secondary or even tertiary responsibility. Professors in colleges of education most often regard themselves as content area specialists and researchers. They are teacher educators only by circumstance. The filtering process that has allowed these individuals to be successful and rise in academic settings is tied to research productivity not skills or a commitment to teacher education.

The situation is not so terribly different in school settings where regular classroom teachers participate in preservice teacher education as cooperating teachers in early field experiences and student teaching. These teachers have achieved status in schools through success in their teaching of students in their classrooms. They are involved in teacher education most often because they have been identified as appropriate models for teaching, but they may not in fact have any skills or interest in teacher education itself. Their concerns are for their own students first and their own work setting second.

Because teacher education is a secondary function in its many contexts, there are centrifugal forces that pull the enterprise apart. Thus, for students, the path toward teaching is often circuitous and discontinuous, perpetually under construction. It is up to the student to make some sense of the parts and indeed integrate them into a program. Moreover, those who educate teachers in each of these contexts never face the difficult task of holding the enterprise together and defining what constitutes reasonable knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, or classroom practice. We end up defining and rearranging credit hours but neglect such basic questions as what ar elementary teacher must reasonably know about mathematics of what a junior high school science teacher needs to know about science. To further compound the problem, recent trends suggest that such definitions will be made by state education agencies and their subcontractors developing competency tests rather than by teacher educators in either academic departments or schools of education.

What The Preservice Teacher Expects Of The Profession

The choice made by an individual to enter into teaching as a career is not unlike the choice made by an individual to enter into any occupation. In so far as choosing a career in a conscious, rationale decision making process, consideration is given to the potential for rewards and also the expectation for occupational satisfaction. Teaching as an occupation has undergone enormous changes in terms of the reward structure and the potential for satisfaction over the fast few decades. These changes have led many not to choose teaching as a career. Many others enter the profession with expectations tied to the past not the present and certainly not the future.

It is important that we be as honest as possible with our preservice students in terms of reasonable expectations for life as a teacher. The extrinsic rewards for teaching come chiefly through two avenues: pay and prestige. While in most occupations pay and prestige are pretty much in line with one another (i.e., the greater the prestige the higher the pay) in the case of teaching this has not always been true. Historically, pay for teachers has been relatively low while prestige fairly high in comparisor to other occupations. If one believes the latest Gallop polls on the public's view of teaching as a profession, this relationship no longer holds. The prestige level of teaching as a job has dropped to the point that it is now in line with pay levels as compared with other occupations. Of course, teaching has been able to compete with other professions for high quality people by virtue of its availability to minorities and women. Now that other professions are opening up to minorities and women (e.g., number of women graduating from medical schools has risen from 6 to 25 percent over the past two decades), teaching as a career choice is becoming less and less attractive. The expectations for an income level that is commensurate with the entry and preparation requirements for the profession are simply not in line with the competing careers.

What about the intrinsic rewards of teaching like the job and fulfillment one receives as a result of helping a student to learn? Survey studies suggest that teaching is not as rewarding as it used to be. It appears that a majority of those currently teaching, if they had it to do over again, would choose another career option. A lot of the dissatisfaction is attributed not just to low pay but the characteristics of the work place. Apparently schools are not a very nice place to spend a day...for teachers and for students.

Philip Jackson, in his classic reporting of life in classrooms published in 1968, described in very insightful terms what its like to teach. In one part of the study he relates the findings from some interviews with teachers who had been identified as particularly effective in the classroom. Their talk around the nature of classrooms and what made teaching an appealing life effort suggests some things from an insider's perspective that make teaching worthwhile. Teacher talk centered on such themes as immediacy...that is the variety and excitement that comes with working with children in classrooms. Teachers gauged the adequacy of their own teaching performance based on the immediate reactions of kids and growth over short periods rather than by looking at standardized test scores. This group of effective teachers in fact paid little attention to test scores as an index of their effectiveness. Teachers also spoke around the theme of informality in the classroom...teachers enjoyed the "at ease" nature of the interactions with the students. The described classrooms are far less structured in the traditional sense from the ones that they had studied in as students themselves. Autonomy was another theme that these teachers addressed. They expressed satisfaction in a flexible curriculum and the freedom form the invasion of administrators bent on evaluation. Finally, these teachers spoke of individuality as an important characteristic of teaching...the personal satisfaction that comes with doing a job your own way and doing it well.

Life in classrooms has certainly changed over the past 15 years. Whether one agrees with Jackson's effective teachers in terms of what they value as important or not, we could all agree that there is a lot less of what was keeping these effective teachers around today than there was then. Immediacy, autonomy, informality and individuality are quickly becoming a

thing of the past. Policy mandates affecting curriculum and instruction are coming at teachers from all levels...local school...system wide...and state agencies. Whether the areas of professional reward identified by Jackson will eventually be replaced by themes that are stronger in terms of generating job satisfaction remains to be seen. In terms of preservice teacher education we need to be sure to let our students in on what they can expect life in classrooms to be like in terms of day-to-day professional activity and responsibility.

Some Problems With Simple Solutions

If there is one thing we aren't short on in preservice teacher education it is on ideas for how we might solve all our problems. Each proposal brings with it a certain surface level of appeal in that it promises quick relief and reveals perhaps ever so slightly a part of the complex problem. It is only when we "play" the simple solutions out to their inevitable ends that we see the incredible complexity of the problem.

For example, many have suggested that the underlying problem is one of locating a talented pool of teachers to work with in the first place. If colleges of education would only tighten up on their admissions policies (i.e., raise their standards for entry into the preservice program) then we could strengthen the profession. Ignoring the fact that we have no research base upon which to derive the standards for selecting those who would hold promise as effective teachers, the recommendation is to select on the basis of SAT scores or the like. Colleges of education are then placed in a position of competing directly in the same talent pool with other professional schools. The simple fact is that teacher salaries, work conditions, and professional prestige are not competitive. The adequate supply expectation of schools would not be met. A similar fate would likely

meet efforts to extend the professional preparations period to include a fifth/sixth year program of work.

Colleges of education are still in the midst of enacting one of the simple solutions of the seventies...more and earlier field experiences in the preservice programs. It appears at this time that field based programs are better at preparing future teachers for "taking over" and replicating what is presently going on in schools. Field experiences, however, are taking away time in the preservice program from courses designed to develop new insights and conceptions of curriculum and instruction as they emerge from the research literature. As a result, the innovative expectation of schools is not being met. A similar fate would likely meet proposals to remove preservice teacher education from higher education altogether. Preservice teacher education may not be a very good bridge between research and practice but its the only one we have at the present. We should be sure we have alternative points of contact built into the system before we destroy the one existing link.

The point being made here is not that these particular innovations are ill-intended or even wrong All certainly offer some benefits in the long run. They are representative of how so many of the simple solutions being proposed misdirect our attention from the fundamental problem of what are reasonable expectations for and from preservice teacher education.

A Reasonable Solution

The analysis here suggests that teacher educators, the public at large, and teacher education students must clarify their expectations about what preservice education is and can be. The establishment of a National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education and the recent national conference on Policy, Practice, and Research in Teacher Education held at

the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education are steps in that direction. But more needs to be done and we must remember that clarifying expectations is a continuous process because of the centrifugal forces in the contexts in which preservice teacher education occurs. The greatest danger is that simple solutions which focus on fixing up teacher education at one point in time will misdirect energies that need to be spent on the complex task of defining the content of teacher preparation and integrating the multiple contexts that necessarily constitute the fabric of the enterprise. In the end, clarifying expectations for preservice teacher education might take us a long way toward realizing a dream of many that the careers of teachers and the processes of teacher education be treated as a continuum of professional growth.